

# PLANNED PARENTHOOD

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**We are happy to publish this text, revised and approved by the author, of this important address which was delivered on Monday, November 24th, 1952, at the inauguration of the Third International Conference on Planned Parenthood, held in Bombay.**

I HAVE come here today as a student rather than as a teacher. I have come here to learn about family planning. I am glad that a large number of experts from foreign countries who have studied this question from the scientific, technical and professional aspects are here to advise us as to what we should do on this very vital problem. If you ask me why, in spite of my ignorance of the details of the scientific and technical aspects of family planning, I find myself here, my answer to you is that I fell a prey to the irresistible appeal of the president of the Family Planning Association of India.

Just a few minutes ago I had the pleasure of addressing students of technology at Matunga, while opening two hostels there. The advice given to students in our country according to tradition is—I will give you the sanskrit first—"mātr devo bhava, pitr devo bhava, ācārya devo bhava, atithi devo bhava, prajatanam māt vyavacchesih"—"do not cut off the thread of offspring." Students, when they complete their careers, are called upon to enter the state of the householder and there the advice given to them is "do not cut off the thread of offspring." In other words, they are called upon to marry and produce offspring. We never regard sex as something impious or obscene. It is the duty, normally speaking—we are not making laws for exceptional cases—of young students when they leave the universities to enter into the state of marriage, and there the main purpose of marriage is inculcated as the production of offspring. Marriage is the union of man and woman, and family life is enlarged and completed by the arrival of children.

Those who wish to avoid children for personal reasons, or for reasons of comfort, or for reasons of leading independent lives, are not encouraged. All the same, if you subject women to frequent childbirths, you will be guilty of cruelty to human beings, you will undermine their health, you will impair family happiness, you will be making difficult marriages which otherwise might have been successful. If, therefore, your intention is to safeguard the health and happiness of family life, you must determine the time of childbirth, space the arrival of the children. I take it, to determine this is to plan a family. If, therefore, your main interest is to secure the health and happiness of both mothers and children, if your main interest is to bring down the infant and maternal mortality in this country which is so ruinous, it is essential for us to adopt a system of family planning. I appeal for that in the name of social welfare of both parents and children. I do not think it is anybody's view here that we should overstrain and tax the health of mothers, and bring into being weaklings who are not able to stand the strain of life, people whose bodies are crippled from the very start. It is, therefore, essential that there should be some system of planning of families.

There is a social aspect to this problem also. We have today two and a half billion human beings in this world. We now talk about human rights. The Declaration on Human Rights has been adopted by the United Nations and the UNESCO. In other words, we wish to provide for children all facilities of food, clothing, shelter, medicine, education, etc. We have committed ourselves to this doctrine of human rights. There was a time when we regarded human beings as so much chattel; human beings were poor, ignorant, illiterate, diseased and crippled. Those days are over. People are not prepared to accept as axiomatic poverty, misery, starvation and the like. We are

committed to a social welfare State. It is our aim in this country to see to it that our children are given every kind of facility to grow into healthy, happy, responsible citizens of our community. Are we in a position to do so at the present moment? Are we doing it? On every side I turn there is discontent, dissatisfaction, and everybody thinks that every child however humble it may be has a right to grow up in peace and security, has a right to be treated when it falls ill, has a right to be educated. We are not in a position even with our present population to give that kind of assistance to our people. So it seems that where other countries like Russia, or New Zealand or Australia encourage larger families, there is a feeling that in our country we must try to do something to limit population. The Planning Commission speaks of it; as the Prime Minister's message read just now says, we must try to reduce population, to limit population, and we are not committed to any one method. Mahatma Gandhi said that by means of abstinence you must try to bring down population; he did not want so many people brought into existence who could not properly be cared for. That is the conviction of many of the leaders of our country.

The question is sometimes raised whether it is not true that God sends children into this world and we should not interfere with the Will of God—that is the way in which it is put. I may tell you that if God has given us any intelligence, he has given it to us to be used. Intelligence is a Divine gift, anticipating consequences and planning with special relevance to the facts. These are things which we are called upon to adopt because the human mind is a gift of the Divine. We have had infanticide, we have had pestilence, we have had floods and earthquakes, and we have been acquiescing in all sorts of evil practices in this country. We have inherited not only great areas of light, but we have inherited large tracts of darkness and ignorance.

What is civilization? It is a progressive control of nature. While in the animal world it is the environment that selects who sur-

vives and who does not survive, man is given intelligence to adapt himself to the environment. The duty which human individuals have is to find out what the social needs are, what the physical needs are, what the spiritual needs are, and strive to fulfil them. God is not an external despot. He is there in the innermost depth of our being, and when the still small voice prompts us, asks us to use our intelligence in a fairminded, objective, honest way we are using the gift of God for purposes of human welfare. That is how we have to employ our intelligence to achieve human welfare.

We have various ideas as to how there can be limitation of population. There are some who tell us that if we raise human standards there will be a fall in the birth rate—look at some of the advanced Western countries. There are others who tell us that by the application of modern science and technology we can improve the world's yield of food, so that the increase of population will never outrun the subsistence level. There are still others who tell us that if we only change our economy, if our whole social structure is altered, then we can go on producing as many as we please with no disastrous results. These are all different ways in which we are called upon to look at this problem of family planning. I want to say these are long-term remedies. Our need is desperate, the claims of humanity appeal to us, and it is essential that we should do something for regulating population. We have interfered with nature, we have controlled nature in lowering the death rate, postponing death, combating disease, prolonging human life, to preserve ourselves from floods and earthquakes. In all these matters, we are using human intelligence—to prolong the life of human beings and to preserve them for a higher purpose—that is what we are attempting to do. But we are told, just when it comes to limitation of population, that we are interfering with the drift of nature. The drift of nature is excessive production. The poorer we are, the more ill-nourished we are. Sex is the only indoor sport open to us and large families are produced. It is the poor people

that produce large families and not the rich ones.

Now, how can we best bring about limitation of population? We are told that Gandhi is our greatest authority here. He said "I want limitation of population, but the method which we should adopt is the method of abstinence, austerity and self-control." There is no doubt that it is the best method, but, I should like to ask, whether it be by self-control or abstinence or austerity of living that limitation of population is brought about, is not that an interference with nature? If we do not control ourselves, we will produce more, and if we do control ourselves we will produce less. Well, there is an interference with nature even there, and so far as we are concerned most of us are human beings striving to be saintly, but have not yet become saints. There is another method which is called the "rhythm method." There are safe periods and there are unsafe periods. In unsafe periods abstain, in safe periods it doesn't matter what we do. Well, this method makes out that we can interfere with nature. That is what they tell us. It also recognizes that marriage has got its own justification apart from parenthood because we are allowed to use sex for purposes of mutual satisfaction without any expectation of producing offspring. So, here again, there is this method of abstinence for certain periods, but indulgence for certain other periods, and so, this method also is an interference with nature and at the same time admits that marriage has its own value apart from parenthood. That is what it comes to, but here we avoid the application of mechanical and chemical means. We have that next. There again, there is interference with nature and we also have a recognition that marriage has its justification apart from parenthood.

There is a journal called *Science* published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. That journal points out that scientists are experimenting with an anti-fertility drug which is to be administered orally, which has got all the value without the disvalue of other methods

which are now being adopted. Science, I may tell you, will go on advancing and will give us all sorts of methods which are bound to be used for the use of man. All knowledge is a double-edged sword, whether it is atomic energy or whether it is contraceptives. It all depends on the purpose for which this knowledge is employed. If we employ it for preserving health and happiness for medical, scientific, social or economic reasons, we cannot ban it. If we use these methods for illicit gratification of our appetites or for evading the consequences of our acts, it is to be deprecated. So, whether we use it for a or b depends entirely on the frame of mind or the purpose for which we use it. In this world there are no absolutes, except the well-being of man. The world is one of perpetual movement. We call it the world of sansāra.

St. Paul thought celibacy was the highest ideal, but then found that those who were celibates were getting disturbed, disorganized and disintegrated in their minds. So he said: "It is better to marry than to burn." Instead of burning by the effects of a single life, if our development requires marriage, go and get married.

We know that Ghandi himself was a philosophical anarchist who believed that individuals must be self-regulated, self-controlled; but in view of the circumstances of the world he acquiesced in social regulations, prisons, police, etc. He taught us to resist evil by non-violence and added, "but if you can't resist evil by non-violence, cowardice is worse than violence. But resistance to evil is essential. Never submit to evil." The ideal is non-resistance, resistance by non-violent means but resistance by violent means is not to be ruled out if we are incapable of spiritual resistance. He made a distinction between what may be regarded as the ideal and what is to be regarded as the permissible. Now, when we have all these methods, when the Planning Commission has told us, when the leaders tell us that it is essential for us to control increase of population, it is open to us to find out, each for himself, what is best adapted to his own development. I may say,

if the purpose is not wrong, there is no ethical or spiritual harm done, and it is the purpose which determines the use or abuse of these modern inventions. If a surgeon inflicts pain to heal he is not wrong; if a murderer inflicts pain to kill, he is guilty of the greatest crime.

I am not an authority on these matters, but I have heard these things talked about, and I was trying to think for myself what exactly should be the attitude so far as our country is concerned. This attitude of the ideal and the permissible has come down to us from ancient times. There is a verse which says "we have the vedic methods, the

brahmanical method of fighting evil with spiritual weapons. If we are unable to do it, fight evil with military weapons. Both are permissible, but spiritual resistance is higher than military resistance." That is how the ancient scriptures put it.

As I said, I do not know much of these things, but I do know that something requires to be done and your Conference, consisting of so many experts, will be able to tell us what are the harmful methods and what are the health-producing methods. I wish the Conference every success, and hope that we in this country will profit by the lessons which it will be able to give us.

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